



HR STAR



Senior Vice President of HR at Dimension Data Americas: Denise Messineo

[By Robin Salisian]

“No day is the same,” says Denise Messineo about the HR profession. In fact, HR employees must don numerous hats: “They must be strategic, responsive, proactive, and agile to be successful. They must be seen as approachable, objective, and compassionate. If you want to be a part of the heart of an organization that is fast-paced and exciting, seek out HR professional roles — you’ll never look back!”

And Messineo never did. After landing her first job in the HR field, she held on tightly and never let go. Today, she is as the senior vice president of human resources at Dimension Data Americas.

Her journey, however, began outside of HR. She received her bachelor’s in technical management from the University of Maryland and her master’s in applied behavioral science from Johns Hopkins University. But HR experience or not, she exuded qualities any employer would be drawn to.

According to Messineo, “I applied at my first job in the insurance industry and landed the role. Hard work, perfect attendance, engagement, [and] good performance all led me to my next role. I am driven, always seeking to do well, and I am conscientious and loyal.”

But how did Messineo finally discover her niche in human resources?

“I started my career with one of the top three casualty insurance companies in the U.S., holding various roles in administration and then in claims adjusting and claims management. There I was able to really get involved in helping to solve challenging issues for people and the organization,” says Messineo.

“All of my roles have involved significant interactions with people,” she adds, “both at the client level and at the employee level. I have a passion [for] helping people face challenges and to be the best they can be no matter the circumstances.”

Eventually, Messineo took that passion and carried it with her to a new company,

Q. What do you like to do outside of HR? Any odd hobbies/interests? Are you married? Do you have children? Can you explain a little about your personal life outside of work?

A. I have two fabulous adult children. My daughter is a newlywed living in Colorado and is in the technology field. My son is in real estate development, and we are the very proud grandparents of their daughter and a soon-to-be-born son! Aside from spending time with them, I am a movie buff. I read several books at one time, and I do cardio workouts at least five times a week. In addition, I love spending time with friends, just relaxing — especially on game nights! I have season tickets to three different theatres between Washington, DC, and Baltimore, and we also love to listen to live music at small venues or festivals. Lastly, since our children are grown, my husband and I enjoy traveling together and took up golf 18 months ago. We are nine-hole players that laugh at ourselves quite a bit. My life is full and each week is different and never dull!

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Eric Scott’s new CD entitled *RED*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Southern Living*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Law and Order – SVU*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I don’t have one individual role model — that would be too limiting in my personal growth and development. I have been influenced by many during my life journey, some famous and some not. Right now, I would say that I have a special relationship with one of our consultants, that I learn something new about myself and others every time I am in her presence.

where she became its director of operations. While there, she was responsible for seven states in business operations and human resources. But five years later, her role became obsolete.

“[My company] developed a completely new way to handle claims at a lower cost per claim...They asked me to stay on for six months and help them develop and deliver the training for the new model, which I did.”

When one door closes, however, another opens. A college peer soon asked Messineo to become the employment director at IT company Timebridge, later acquired by Dimension Data. Surprisingly (after having demonstrated such tenacity and passion for her work), she didn’t jump at the opportunity, and instead took some time off.

However, when asked about regrets, Messineo confesses, “I would have come to work at Timebridge when first approached.

“Taking a position there was the best career decision I have ever made,” she continues. “I allowed fear of the unknown (leaving the insurance industry to go to the IT industry) [to delay] my decision. My gut instinct has never let me down, [but] I let my head override my gut!”

In other words, Messineo *loves* her current job.

Rising from employment director to senior vice president, Messineo has thrived at Dimension Data Americas. DDAM, a \$3.8 billion IT consulting firm, is located in almost 40 offices worldwide. “We plan, build, support, and manage IT infrastructure



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solutions that help over 6,000 clients achieve their business goals,” says the company’s [website](#). “Drawing on our experience in network integration, security, converged communications, data centers and storage, [and] contact centre and Microsoft technologies, we deliver a full lifecycle of IT services.”

At DDAM, Messineo is home and succeeds in all she does.

“I enjoy most the collaborative experience that I have with my fellow executive team,” she says. “I have the best HR team that can be found anywhere, and I get to interact with people that do ‘cool stuff’ everyday!” Plus, Messineo enjoys having an impact on “helping individuals be the best they can be both internally and externally.”

As for the downsides of her work: “My role requires me to travel quite a bit. That sometimes does not allow me to interact directly with my team as much as I would like to. In addition, the external environment has an impact [on] our business. I do not like having other forces control our destiny and success.

“Fortunately,” she continues, “we have great leaders that have lead us through some challenging times in the past, and I am truly confident that we have the right people in place to continue our journey.”

But it is her accomplishments that prove her success, and Messineo has many. Not only did she and her team develop a five-year plan to “gain control of the upward spiral of health care costs” in 2007, they also marketed their plan, securing not only a better plan with improved coverage, but also securing \$1 million in cost savings to the organization in 2008.

“This is unheard of in the health care benefits arena,” says Messineo. “HR can have a positive financial impact on the business. It truly shows our ability to be a strategic business partner.”

However, regardless of positive teamwork, there are certain areas of HR Messineo and her team have little control over.

“The war for IT talent that drives our business is real,” she says. “There is a shortage of specialized IT skills that has hindered our ability to develop a pipeline of talent to fill our future needs. We are working to develop corrective solutions to this issue that all IT services companies are facing. It is the top area that causes me great concern and is shared among most of my peers in the industry.”

But this HR star is a proactive, hardworking HR professional who refuses to let challenges stop her. Instead, she plows on, confident that her expertise in employee

challenges and her ability to collaborate with others will carry DDAM into a successful future.

With her own successes in mind, she offers several pieces of advice:

- “If you want to simply help people, you need to go into social work as that is not the focus of HR. Our role is to remove barriers that keep employees from focusing on productivity that drives the strategic and financial goals of the company, whether it’s a for-profit or non-profit organization.
- “Ensure that you understand the changing dynamics of the HR profession. We have moved from administrators to strategic business partners. The focus today is [on] how we can enable the business to meet the strategic goals and not [on] how we can get paperwork completed!
- “HR is a profession. As such, it is imperative that HR professionals keep up their skills. They need to ensure that they network outside of their organization and attend HR professional meetings.”

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